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608 572 and a young woman. If the relationship is formed by the latter, they probably have met at a funeral celebration and become interested in each other. The ceremonial requires each of the pair to twist seven strands of cotton into a cord to serve as a necklace. The youth first puts his cord over the young woman's head, taking great care not to touch her head-dress or person. In similar fashion the young woman slips her cord over the young man's head. Probably a formula was originally repeated in confirmation of this dual action. If so, it has vanished together with any consultation of the chicken bones that may have taken place. The cords must be worn seven days without being broken or removed, lest the agreement be made void. Thereafter they address each other only as "mwi." The relation thus established does not allow one to take any liberties with the other, but rather tends to the safeguarding of each as if they were brother and sister. The relationship is supposed to be for life, but does not, of course, prevent the separation of the two by a greater or less distance. In such an event, when one goes into the neighborhood of the other, a present is taken along for one's "mwi." Often mementoes or gifts are exchanged when the compact is first made. It is current usage for school friends to call one another "mwi" without any ceremony, but simply in token of kindly regard. [431]

## THE GUEST-CHAMBER AND CLUB-ROOM

574 576 [688] In the earlier days among the Karen of the hills the "blaw" was an important feature of village life.[1] It is still retained, although it seems to have lost some of its former significance. It is the guest and club-room reserved in the central part of the village-house. Strangers coming in for a visit or passing by on their journey are entertained here. Such a convenience was quite necessary in the days when the tabu of the "Bgha" feast was strictly observed, and no outsider was allowed to enter the family-rooms. My party and I have been entertained in the "blaw" of villages in the Pegu Hills on the Tharrawaddy side, while on tour. In one village, which had adopted some Buddhist practices, along one side of the guest-room extended a high shelf upon which stood a small image of Gautama Buddha, with the usual offerings of paper flags and wilted leaves and flowers. At the back of the room was the raised dais on which I spread my bed, but I was pre-

[1] In Sir J. G. Scott's *Burma, A Handbook*, p. 122, this institution is referred to under the name of "haw." See also *Upper Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Pt. I, 539, ff.

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vented from enjoying a good night's rest by the number of other occupants. My cook prepared my meals at the little fireplace in the middle of the room. The villagers sat about and visited with us. When meal-time came the women and girls brought in their generous supplies of food, consisting of two large trays piled high with snow-white steaming rice, besides smaller trays and bowls filled with several kinds of curry, "ngape" water, and vegetables. The visitors were expected to eat something from every dish. While the meal was in progress the hosts withdrew, except one or two elders, the women returning afterwards to clear away the dishes and uneaten food with the polite remark that their guests had eaten very little. Many shared in receiving us; and we were spared the embarrassment, not to say the danger according to our belief, of violating the tabu that prevented our being entertained at the time by a family in their own quarters.

Besides serving as a guest-chamber, the "blaw" has another important use, namely, as the gathering-place for the young men of the village. When a boy becomes a youth ("hpo tha hkwa taw"), he is expected to spend his leisure time in his parents' room, working and eating with them, as seems to be the custom. When evening comes, he repairs to the "blaw" to be with his fellows and to sleep there. This is a custom that is common among the Kachins of Burma and many other tribes of the Orient. Among the Kachins the "blaw" is a place of license. The Brecs also allow a great deal of liberty to their young people, and evidently advantage of it is taken by them. But among the Sgaw Karens, at any rate, the girls remain with their mothers. There is no common room for the girls, or any place where both youths and maidens may meet for restrained intercourse. No doubt among the Karen the use of the "blaw" as a club-room is for the purpose of keeping the young men together and separating them from the young women, thus preventing offence of the "by na," which would bring a curse upon the soil and damage to the crops.

It has never been possible for parents to prevent all social intercourse between young people of the opposite sexes. In fact, it has hardly ever been attempted. As is shown elsewhere in this volume, there are occasions among the Karen when the sexes mingle, for example, on fishing expeditions and at marriages, funerals, etc. If, however, a youth desires to visit a maiden, etiquette prescribes the way: he must take his harp ("t'na"), appear before her house, and serenade her. Sitting down, he sings to the accom-

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 APT Burma
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itself, when it has left the body of its own volition or on account of a sudden fright, and is liable to become lost in the jungle. In such cases the "k' la" must be lured back and induced to remain in the body it normally animates.

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The "Hti k' sa kaw k' sa" are the powers that rule the earth and that most abhor the sins of lust.[1] It is to these powers that the Sgaw and Bwe tribes make a periodic sacrifice ("Ta lu hpa do" or the great sacrifice), ordinarily once in three years, but when the crops fail because of their sins, as they think, as often as once a year. The sacrifice serves the double purpose of honoring the lords of the land and water and purging the people of their carnal sins. When, therefore, the tribes enjoy a prolonged period of prosperity, they consider themselves morally acceptable to the powers and delay their sacrifice for four or even five years.[2]

## A. The Great Sacrifice of the Sgaw

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Among the Sgaw the great sacrifice is ordered by the most influential chief of the country, his directions being given to those chiefs who are willing to acknowledge his superiority and by them in turn to their villages. The time being appointed, a suitable spot near a good stream is chosen to which every family is expected to bring a boar and a white fowl, while the chiefs each bring a bullock or a goat. An altar of bamboo with seven posts on each side is erected, the roof of which consists of seven tiers each smaller than the one below, like that of a Buddhist palace. Posts are set round to which the sacrificial creatures are tied. On the day named for the ceremonies a jar of liquor is placed at the foot of each post, and a young man is appointed by each chief to kill his animal after a prayer has been uttered by the great chief. During the prayer the young men stand holding their "xeh" (sickles) over their victims, while the chiefs place their hands on the animals. The prayer is as follows:

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"O Lords of the land and water. O Lords of mercy. Lest the country should be stricken and the grain destroyed; lest the people should be distressed and a pestilence come upon them, we put our sins on these buffaloes, oxen, and goats.[3] From this day henceforth may it please you to disregard our sins. Let

[1] See page 225.

[2] Dr. Mason in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XXXIV, pp. 212, ff.; Rev. T. Than Bya in *Karen Customs*, pp. 20, ff.

[3] In these ceremonies one can readily see the similarity to that of the scapegoat of ancient Israel. (Lev. 16:21-22). For a full discussion of this widespread idea, see Sir J. G. Frazer's article on "The Scape Goat," in *The Golden Bough*, Vol. IX.